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The meaning of place and state-led gentrification in Birmingham's Eastside

Abstract

Despite Birmingham's claim to constitute 'England's second city', it has arguably been overlooked in much recent academic research - perhaps because of a tendency to regard Manchester as the paradigmatic English example of the emerging post-industrial city-region. Contributors to CITY have gone some way to redressing this imbalance - with Frank Webster's paper in vol 5 no 1 and Kevin Ward's paper in vol 7 no 2 underlining the wider issues raised by the adoption of 'urban entrepreneurialism' in Birmingham. This paper, by Libby Porter and Austin Barber, takes forward such concerns through a case study of the ongoing regeneration of an individual district of the city: Birmingham Eastside. Using the stories of two pubs, whose fortunes are permanently re-shaped by state-led development initiatives, the paper develops a critical reflection on academic and policy debates relating to gentrification and the restructuring of central districts of large cities. In particular, the authors highlight how current thinking about the regeneration of inner city districts marginalizes the socio-cultural meaning of place and the human networks that animate city places. They argue that this constrains planning possibilities and imaginations for the area's future. The paper's concluding call for urban analysts and planners alike to go beyond the economic when examining the processes and effects of urban change resonates with much work previously published in CITY. In particular, Porter and Barber's analysis echoes Frank Webster's assertion in vol 5 no 1 that, whatever else it may have achieved, regeneration in Birmingham appears to have resulted directly in a destruction of community.

Introduction

The social and economic implications arising from the rehabilitation of central urban districts has been an enduring theme in the study of cities and urban planning since the 1980s. In particular, considerable attention has more recently focused on city-centre fringe areas—historic, formerly industrial, zones of transition that are transformed by state-led processes into sites for new business activity, high-value housing and associated consumption spaces.

Recent debate about the implications and meaning of such change has been pursued in two related but distinct strands of literature. One concerns the analysis of a 'third wave' of gentrification—the reclamation of commercial and industrial land and buildings for residential and other uses. Here, the transformation of central districts, facilitated by the state and driven by private capital, leads to a re-differentiation of urban space along class lines, displacing existing communities and businesses (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lambert and Boddy, 2002; Cameron, 2003; Lees, 2003a,b, Ward 2003).

A second, related body of urban regeneration literature centres on economic concerns relating to the characteristics of new business activity and employment generation that

emerges in such distinctive urban spaces. This literature typically highlights the regenerative impacts emanating from the growth of new economic sectors, particularly the 'creative industries', and the development of related places of consumption with benefits for the local economy and city image (Montgomery, 1995; Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998; Brown *et al.*, 2000; Florida, 2002). Such thinking has been highly influential on contemporary urban policy frameworks in European cities, and it is this new conventional wisdom that we seek to critically understand.

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on key tenets of both literature and related urban policy thinking and to pose some critical observations about the implications for our understanding of the restructuring of central urban space. We do so by drawing on the contradictions of inner-city urban regeneration and gentrification emerging from our research in the Eastside district of Birmingham. This classic city-centre fringe area is experiencing significant state-led regeneration activity and associated development pressures. Our paper broadens the critique offered by the gentrification literature of state-led, boosterist-style regeneration activity.

In one respect our discussion questions some commonly held assumptions about the relationship between the *form of regeneration* that occurs and the nature of *socio-economic benefits* that accrue for the city and its residents. We critically assess claims made in favour of 'urban renaissance' policies against critics who highlight how such policies deliberately hide structural socio-economic exclusions and injustices (Smith, 1987, 1996; Zukin, 1995; Lees, 2003b; Moulaert *et al.*, 2004b). We use the fortunes of two historic pubs—the *Old Railway* and the *Fox and Grapes*—as narratives that highlight the consequences of urban renaissance policies and some of the exclusions that result.

Yet when we completed this analysis, we began to find our discussions with practitioners and our colleagues shackled to the impact of inner-city redevelopment on labour markets, housing markets and land values. The fortune of two small pubs was hardly front-page news, in this context. Yet the story of the *Old Railway* and the *Fox and Grapes* began to highlight complexities within urban redevelopment programmes not easily answered by the usual conceptual and methodological tools. In particular, they exemplified the exclusion of debate about the socio-cultural meaning of such places and the networks that animate them. Initial research into the planning frameworks that govern Eastside, and the discourses that revolve around the two pubs, indicates this marginalization, as we will show. Our research, however, is only in its early stages, and we anticipate that future work, along the lines that we suggest later in this paper, will shed further analytical light on these questions. Our paper concludes with a critical analysis of how current debates tend to privilege economic issues, limiting our thinking about city spaces and notions of justice. In Eastside, we find this approach can radically constrain planning possibilities and imaginations for the area's future.

The paper is structured along these lines of argument, as a narration of the development of our thinking. We begin by telling the stories of the *Old Railway* and the *Fox and Grapes* in the context of Eastside regeneration and the wider re-making of urban space in central Birmingham. We start here, because this is where our own thinking started—in the minutiae of neighbourhood change. These narratives help us critically discuss key issues in relation to existing gentrification and urban policy

debates. In particular, we seek to highlight the contradictions and tensions that are generated in such complex urban spaces as Eastside, and in so doing highlight some limitations in the current policy and academic discourses. Finally, we conclude with some thoughts on the challenge of conceptualizing place as more than a collection of economic units and relations, for both urban policy makers and urban researchers.

A tale of two pubs

The *Old Railway* and the *Fox and Grapes* are two historic pubs located within the planning area of Eastside designated by Council (see Figure 1).

The *Old Railway* is a backstreet pub that has provided one of the best live music venues in Birmingham for over 40 years. Bands including Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath began their road to success there in the 1960s and 1970s, and the venue regularly hosts young artists in the region. Despite its barely pleasing appearance (see Figure 2), The *Old Railway* is described by many as the best live-gig venue in Birmingham, with excellent acoustics and an excellent atmosphere (Hollins, 2004). A recent review on a Birmingham gig website described the pub's most distinctive feature as:

“the live bands that play a broad selection of styles every night from 60s rock 'n' roll to smooth blues and the odd tribute band. We don't want to be too vocal but we really should drum it into you—in a city with bugger all in the way of live music this really hits the right note.” (itchy birmingham, n.d.)

But the *Old Railway* has been closed and acquired by the regional development agency Advantage West Midlands (AWM) as part of its initiative to purchase all properties in the vicinity for future redevelopment. There has been some public outcry from those who regarded the pub as key to the city's live music scene, with local historians supporting the voices of young musicians (Hollins, 2004). The walls of the pub have been decorated with 'goodbye' messages from regulars (see Figure 3).

The pub will soon be demolished, along with many other buildings in the district, to make way for the development of a new high-tech office precinct and city-centre park. Both developments are central to the public policy vision for Eastside. The city park, which will be developed on land surrounding and including where the *Old Railway* pub currently stands, is presented by Birmingham City Council as a “major environmental and leisure amenity for residents, workers and visitors in the area”, “both an attraction in its own right and also a part of the route to Millennium Point and visitor attractions beyond”, which will “create an attractive setting for new development” (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 10). The Technology Park, which will sit between the park and Aston University to the north, is envisaged as a development that will “increase the ability of the local economy to compete on the international marketplace”, provide “expansion space” to the existing Aston Science Park and promote “an economy based around knowledge, expertise, innovative ideas and entrepreneurial skills” to enable Birmingham to become a 'knowledge capital' (Birmingham City Council, 2004c, p. 1). The area will be dominated by “science and technology uses”, while allowing for other uses to provide for a “24-hour community” (p. 6).

The *Fox and Grapes* pub is an older-style 'traditional ale' pub that graces a street corner on the very edge of Birmingham's city centre. The building is listed as having significant heritage value and is an excellent example of the 'heritage' English pub (see Figure 4).

The *Fox and Grapes* is located on the site of the new City Park Gate development scheme—the second large-scale development that will be built as part of the Eastside regeneration programme. According to the City Council, the City Park Gate scheme constitutes a “unique opportunity to create an exemplar mixed use development of the very highest quality” (Birmingham City Council, 2004d, p. 3). The development will comprise a mix of uses comprising residential units (including an unknown proportion of affordable housing), offices and retail uses. It is the first scheme in Eastside to be developed under Birmingham City Council's new 'sustainability' banner (see Porter and Hunt, 2005).

Due to its statutory listing as a Grade II building, the *Fox and Grapes*—unlike the *Old Railway*—is required by the outline planning approvals for City Park Gate to be retained in the new development scheme. It will continue to operate as a pub and its existing façade will be maintained. Yet Birmingham City Council has compulsorily purchased the property from its former freehold owner and landlord. The owner objected to the compulsory acquisition of her property, questioning why the purchase was necessary if the building was to be retained and no change in use was planned. The Council argued that the acquisition was necessary

“... to enable the comprehensive redevelopment of the area to proceed. The retention of the *Fox and Grapes* within the scheme will necessitate accommodation and other refurbishment works to ensure that it *sits appropriately* within the redevelopment scheme. The upper floors have been allowed to fall into disrepair and it is believed that the current owners do not have sufficient resources to carry out the necessary repairs. The Council seeks to acquire the property to ensure that these important works are carried out.” (Birmingham City Council, 2003, p. 25, emphasis added)

In particular, the Council positions the acquisition of the pub as “in the public interest” because the acquisition is necessary to allow the City Park Gate scheme “to proceed with certainty and to a reasonable timescale”. The public interest identified by the Council includes “significant environmental, social and economic benefits for Eastside, the City as a whole and the wider region” (Birmingham City Council, 2003, p. 26). At a Council meeting on 4 May 2005, where a progress report on City Park Gate was presented by planning officers, Councillors expressed satisfaction that the *Fox and Grapes* was being retained and that the pub provided crucial heritage conservation interest.

The pub is now closed for business, awaiting the redevelopment of the site to commence, although final detailed planning approval and a development agreement are yet to be reached between the City Council and Countryside Properties. The pub's former regulars, mostly workers from the surrounding factories and warehouses, have been forced to find new drinking holes and lunchtime retreats (pers. comm., 20 June 2005).

The closure of these two pubs has not, as might have been expected, caused the organization of a popular struggle. As discussed above, the landlady of the *Fox and Grapes* made an objection through the Compulsory Purchase process (reported earlier in this section), and there was some publicity about the fate of the *Old Railway* due to its iconic status in Birmingham's music scene. Apart from this and some anecdotal evidence of the dismay of regulars at the *Fox and Grapes*, there was very little public outcry or struggle to retain the pubs or protest their closure. Why this is the case is an interesting question, but one that is outside the central focus of this paper.

The fortunes of these two pubs are indicative of the kinds of pressures and disruptions that are emerging in Eastside and which might be considered typical of large-scale urban restructuring projects. Yet the irony is that Eastside is ostensibly meant to generate a distinctive kind of profile and character for Birmingham's central area, built on creativity, diversity and the industrial heritage of the city (Birmingham City Council, 2001a) with the aim of creating a unique and 'authentic' urban space. For the Council, this constitutes a departure from the attitude that drove earlier phases of city-centre regeneration which were underpinned by a desire amongst political and business leaders to equip the city for a new climate of international urban competition and to fashion a suitably modern, appealing image. Recent claims that Birmingham is a premier European shopping destination mark a dramatic turn in the fortunes of the city's image, once thought of as one of the most unattractive in Britain. That change in fortunes is the result of a sustained city marketing campaign that began with the development of the International Convention Centre, Symphony Hall and Brindleyplace in the 1980s, culminating in the recent opening of the new Bull Ring shopping centre.

Eastside, however, is billed as having “the potential to set new standards for urban life through radical new thinking and through adherence to the highest quality in urban and building design, scheme content and social inclusion” (Birmingham City Council, 2004a, p. 3). Formally launched in 1999, the initiative includes ambitious plans for major infrastructural changes, the creation of several flagship projects (including the Millennium Point science and technology centre opened in 2001), and comprehensive redevelopment of swathes of the historic Digbeth area through a series of themed sub-districts, including sustainable urban villages and creative quarters. Sites near the city core are earmarked for high-density mixed-use development (offices, residential, retail and leisure uses). Other areas are proposed for a learning zone (university and college facilities), a technology park for knowledge-sector firms, another office-based mixed-use district, a city park and a possible new city library (see Figure 5). The proposals are led and co-ordinated by the City Council, supported by public funds drawn from its own resources and much greater sums from the regional development agency, the European Regional Development Fund and National Lottery programmes.

Eastside, then, is being promoted as a distinct and unique district for Birmingham, one that will be design led, value people-oriented spaces, be based on principles of urban sustainability, and be more 'fine-grain' than the more monolithic developments of Brindley Place and the Bull Ring. At face value this appears to herald a cherishing of some of the less conventional and quirkier aspects of inner-city life. How and why, then, do activities and uses that appear to fit the bill of 'heritage' and 'creativity' (such as those exemplified by our two pubs) become displaced? And what is lost in the

process? In the next section we place Eastside in the context of wider debates about contemporary urban policy and spatial change to flesh out these contradictions.

Eastside in context: urban renaissance in the UK

The Eastside scheme sits squarely within the UK Government's vision for the renaissance of cities, as set out in its Urban White Paper (UWP). The UWP seeks a 'return' to the city of investment, economic activity and residential life through a national target to build 60% of all new housing on previously used or 'brownfield' land (Lambert and Boddy, 2002). In addition, these re-urbanization policies feature a focus on good urban design as a means of underpinning sustainable living, a restructuring of city-region economies toward growth sectors and an attraction (through high-quality housing and urban environments) of the middle classes to the inner city.

Lees has argued, however, that underlying the UWP (and the report of Lord Rogers's Urban Task Force that preceded it) is a "discursively invisible process of gentrification" (Lees, 2003b, p. 61). For Lees, and others, this policy turn marks a shift to 'third-wave gentrification'. This new form of gentrification is substantially state induced, dominated by large development corporations in terms of investment and redevelopment activity, and generally entails the building of new homes on previously industrial land (see Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees 2003a,b).

The extent to which this style of urban redevelopment can be called 'gentrification' has come under question (Lambert and Boddy, 2002). Yet if gentrification is defined more broadly as a "redifferentiation of the cultural, social, and economic landscape" as Smith (1987, p. 168) suggests, then a substantial continuity in the trends and effects of contemporary urban change with previous phases is evident. This redifferentiation of place requires, for its policy rationale, the definition of an inner-city 'problem' caused by the lack of middle class presence (resident population, investment or visitation), leaving it to become marked by deprivation and disadvantage (Atkinson, 2002; Seo, 2002). Deprivation and urban decline are thus depicted as an improper part of urban life, requiring (state-led) intervention to eradicate them from a city's image (see Baeten, 2004).

Smith (1996) has observed the use of 'frontier' imagery for certain inner-city spaces as a means to reclaim the inner city for middle class interests. Marginalized inner-city spaces are defined as wild, dangerous and untamed as a first step in their redevelopment. That 'danger' is then made safe by investment interests who clean up inner cities, making them habitable and consumable for middle class interests. This 'revanchist urbanism', as Smith calls it, is a new means of redifferentiating place as part of capital accumulation processes. Other commentators point to the importance of 'demand' factors in this process. Here, a 'new' middle class (young, high-income professionals) appear to have urban rather than suburban sensibilities, thus becoming key actors of change in post-industrial inner cities (see Lash, 1990; Ley, 1996; McDowell, 1997; Lambert and Boddy, 2002). Whilst the relative importance of demand- and supply-side factors in contemporary gentrification trends is a matter of

some debate (Rose, 1984; Lees, 1994; Ley, 1996; Smith, 1996), it is clearly evident that the marketing of inner-city sites by both the state and private capital has become a visible part of the process. Thus, 'quality design', 'sustainable living', 'urban amenity' and 'heritage and culture' become central to urban policies as a means of stimulating investment in the inner city. Linking culture, design and heritage to the traditional regulatory land-use roles of urban planning practitioners is now successfully setting both the consumption and production conditions for reinvestment in formerly devalued inner-city spaces.

Eastside is an excellent example of this contemporary form of urban redevelopment. As an overwhelmingly 'brownfield' district, with very few existing residents, Eastside exemplifies the shift in investment attention from residential to industrial areas. New investment in Eastside is mostly state directed and required initial capital outlay directed through the local authority (Birmingham City Council) to make major infrastructural changes to the urban environment. A team of people employed by the Council are specifically charged with stimulating confidence and investment in Eastside and have been responsible for assembling and marketing of sites for development (Birmingham City Council, 1999). The Council explicitly fashions Eastside as 'design-led', with principles of good urban design and the creation of attractive and high-quality city spaces at the heart of decision-making processes. The development process is being led in its early stages by international corporate interests and London-based property firms and architectural practices.

A distinct set of policy discourses renders Eastside 'ripe' for redevelopment. The area is portrayed as run-down, degraded, unsafe, unattractive, and lacking a future without significant state and developer intervention. For example, the Digbeth Millennium Quarter Plan (the first planning framework developed to govern the regeneration of Eastside) describes how existing industrial activities occupy "older premises that are no longer ideal for modern activities" (Birmingham City Council, 1996, p. 5). The plan states that "dereliction is evident in places" and that the "general environment is cramped and congested" (ibid, p. 5). A statement about uses existing at that time notes that there are few offices and very little retail activity in the area (ibid, p. 5).

Proximity to the city centre makes Eastside attractive both to business investors and to future residents seeking inner-city lifestyles. The Eastside Development Framework notes that "Eastside is immediately adjacent to Birmingham City Centre and in particular the main shopping area. Much of the area is within 800 metres (5-10 minutes walk) of St. Philips Cathedral" (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 5). Yet activity, development and linkages into the area were previously constrained by the elevated ring road that cut off Eastside from the city centre. The demolition of the ring road (a first development objective of the Council) enabled those linkages and created new development sites (see Figure 5) at Masshouse and City Park Gate that provided the first stimulus to developer investment. Masshouse, for example, is positioned by developer David McLean Group as an extension of the city centre providing 500,000 square feet of Grade A office space, and 550 'high-specification apartments' in addition to cafes, restaurants, retail, a four-star hotel and a new location for the Birmingham Magistrate's Court (David McLean Group, 2005). The apartments are being marketed by Knight Frank, the international property consultancy specializing in luxury, who stated in 2004 that "there is huge demand for further city living opportunities in central Birmingham, so the first residential developer to launch a

scheme at Eastside will be in a very strong position to command the premium prices seen in the city core” (Knight Frank, 2004). At the same time, the city's commercial property community views Masshouse as providing a critical extension of the central business district, addressing the shortage of Grade A offices and large floorplates seen as necessary to attract 'footloose' corporate occupiers (Pain, 2005).

In the northern part of Eastside, the area is predominantly portrayed as a 'blank slate'. For example, within the primary planning framework, the Eastside Development Framework, there is no genuine analysis of the existing environment, the district's natural features or any social, economic or cultural assets. The framework simply points to the existence of Aston University and Aston Science Park as a “centre for learning, research and high technology” which “provides a link back to the industrial history of Digbeth and a 'bridge' to the future” (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 4).

The industrial heritage of Digbeth in the south of Eastside, by contrast, is celebrated as a cultural and economic asset. Its gritty urban environment (exemplified by canals and towpaths, towering bluestone railway viaducts and heritage building facades) is also portrayed as a mark of the area's uniqueness and 'authenticity'. The framework notes that “distinctive street patterns survive in much of the area, criss-crossed by canals and railways” and that “there are numerous listed buildings and important archaeology both above and below ground” (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 4). Through the development of interpretation and heritage trails it is proposed that this “predominantly urban and industrial heritage will be celebrated and has the potential to attract people into the area, complementing Millennium Point” (ibid, p.4). Thus, heritage becomes crucial, in this part of Eastside, for “innovative and sustainable economic regeneration through conservation” (p. 4). Yet this same grittiness requires some cleaning up to encourage further investment and reinvigoration. As stated in the Eastside Development Framework, “vacant sites, poor quality developments and the removal of bad neighbour uses” must take place in order to “provide the potential for new small-scale development in the canal vernacular” (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 13).

Restructuring the economic and social landscape of Eastside by means of re-allocating land use and activity is thus the express policy intent of the local state. This is clearly apparent in the case of the *Fox and Grapes* pub, where the local state has compulsorily acquired the site in order that the pub can be upgraded and refurbished so that it “sits appropriately within the redevelopment scheme” (Birmingham City Council, 2003). The Council clearly envisages a very different local clientele for the *Fox and Grapes* after the City Park Gate development is complete. This intention extends to other economic uses and activities in the area, where Eastside is thought of as a future 'creative quarter' for Birmingham. A senior manager responsible for Eastside within Birmingham City Council has expressed that traditional manufacturing industries “have no place” in the new Eastside. That they are “folding faster than the planning process can push them out” is considered beneficial to allowing new economic sectors to gain a foothold (pers. comm. Eastside Director, 5 July 2004). Neither the Council nor AWM are offering support to businesses in what are considered to be declining sectors. Instead, all attention and support is directed towards growth sectors such as ICT, science and technology, and the creative industries. 'Cleaning up' city spaces to reflect the projected sensibilities of future

Eastside residents and workers is an essential activity to create the economic and socio-cultural conditions for redevelopment of the space.

High-growth sectors such as these generally employ well-educated, well-paid professionals in upwardly mobile occupations that generate high residential mobility. Attracting these sectors to locate in Birmingham requires building attractive and interesting city spaces within which their workforce will live and play (Florida, 2002, p. 221). This 'creative class', as Florida defines it, are looking for genuine, organic city spaces that offer a particular kind of lifestyle. It is of course underpinned by a lower-paid, casualized labour force working the bars, cafes and other personal and business services that support such sectors and their workforces. Others have questioned whether this 'supporting cast' of workers is implicitly excluded from the design and development of these new kinds of city spaces, either by aesthetic or by price (Zukin, 1995; Seo, 2002; Miles, 2005), and whether such developments can be seen as "elitist and expensive" (Birmingham City Council, 2001b, p. 31). Eastside is envisioned as a vibrant, dynamic, creative quarter that will incorporate 'city living'-style residential development, the majority of which will be secured through the private sector and directed for workers in the creative economy, including live/work accommodation, as well educational/student needs (Birmingham City Council, 2001a, p. 12).

Whilst our two pubs both appear to be good examples of the kind of heritage, creativity and local diversity that the Council is notionally supporting in their "radical new thinking" (Birmingham City Council, 2004a, p. 3) for Eastside, they have nevertheless been displaced by the very policy process that seeks to re-create a vibrant, sustainable, authentic city neighbourhood. Indeed, it is the very activities of the state, in this instance, that have produced this displacement, rather than the market. Other parts of Birmingham that have experienced revitalization, such as the Convention Centre Quarter during the 1980s, still retain some of the former, traditional drinking holes, although they too have been 'upgraded' to some extent through investment by corporate owners. In Eastside, by contrast, the displacement has occurred through the definition of 'heritage' in narrow terms that romanticizes a past retained only at the superficial level of building facades and street networks. The cultural heritage of *The Old Railway* (as the place where Birmingham launched local musicians onto the world stage in the 1970s) is forgotten because the building itself is of no heritage value. The facade of the *Fox and Grapes* pub brings an attractive heritage aesthetic to the new urban development that will come to sit around it, but will be sufficiently renovated to exclude the disorder and rough edges of its traditional clientele. As Smith claims:

"the pursuit of difference, diversity, and distinction forms the basis of the new urban ideology, but it is not without contradiction. It embodies a search for diversity as long as it is highly ordered, and a glorification of the past as long as it is safely brought into the present." (1987, p. 168)

In Eastside, the local state plays a key role in the formulation and implementation of this process, by linking its traditional urban planning functions with urban design and economic development priorities (see Birmingham City Council, 2001a). The land assembly powers of the Council and AWM, for example through compulsory acquisition, provide the crucial impetus to drive forward wider 'public interest' agendas such as the creation of new city office and residential locations, and the

cleaning up of formerly industrial areas. The public interest is positioned within both design and economic growth objectives, so that existing citizens of the city-region will benefit from enhanced city spaces, new jobs and wealth-creation opportunities.

By playing to cultural sensibilities that romanticize heritage values and urban lifestyles, the local state in Eastside is attempting to create an ethos about place that will attract the attention of big capital and the middle (creative) class. Acknowledging that this same market simultaneously includes the high-income professionals who work in the growth sectors instantly couples urban design aesthetics with economic development objectives. As the developers of Masshouse state, their development will “create a new market for Birmingham's city living phenomenon—namely those who are searching for a city address that offers the location, infrastructure and all important kudos factor that Masshouse will provide”. Marketing for Masshouse residential units is global, and the developers triumphantly declare that “overseas buyers are queuing up to invest in a Masshouse apartment” (David McLean Group, 2005). Thus, the local state is able to create the necessary economic *and* cultural conditions to radically reshape the socio-economic fabric and structure of the inner city.

The cost, of course—and a long-standing commitment by geographers to researching gentrification has proved this—is the displacement of former, often lower class populations, whether they be workers, residents or other users of the space (see a review of the effect of gentrification on urban neighbourhoods by Atkinson, 2002). In Eastside, we can see some direct effects already with the displacement of two long-standing pubs and the clientele they once served, as well as numerous manufacturing, distribution and wholesaling businesses in the area. Ongoing research into the redevelopment of Eastside will, we hope, shed further analytical light on the nature and impact of this kind of displacement.

Forgetting place

Approaching the redevelopment of inner-city spaces as a form of 'urban renaissance', as proposed by the UWP and exemplified by the Eastside regeneration scheme, is widely regarded as bringing great benefits to a city and its population. The UWP claims that developments that follow the new hallmarks of urban living are more socially inclusive because they expand opportunities for consumption and jobs. This view is a re-stipulation of a much older perspective of justice, currently experiencing a revival, that a just distribution of goods and services is best achieved through market mechanisms and measuring “who is getting what, and where” (Sandercock, 1998, p. 183). Urban environments that are degraded and poor to live or work in cannot, it is claimed, be left as they are, and stimulating private investment and confidence is an inevitable and necessary part of the improvement process. There is a widely held faith operating within contemporary urban policy that marrying 'culture' (in whatever form) with good design and the building of 'mixed-use developments' is likely to generate places that are socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, stimulating and inherently better to live in. Thus, the form of regeneration that occurs (the type of property developers involved, the nature of new enterprises created and the character of the built environment) is integrally linked with the nature of socio-economic

benefits that accrue for the city and its residents (wealth creation, employment generation, and access to new city spaces). Contemporary urban policy in the UK has been highly influenced by commentators who emphasize the importance of indigenous, organic forms of development that are locally rooted and driven by independent actors with consequent benefits for the local economy and city image (see Montgomery, 1995; Crewe and Beaverstock, 1998; Brown *et al.*, 2000; Florida, 2002).

Following other critics of this approach, we question these policy assumptions and seek further rigorous analysis of how this assumption hides structural exclusions and polarizations that are potentially enhanced by such a policy approach (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Webster, 2001; Lambert and Boddy, 2002; Cameron, 2003). One of the potential consequences of this policy approach is the displacement of the poor and marginalized to other areas, often with even less access to urban amenities and services than before. New job creation often hides a greater casualization and underemployment of the labour force, with few secure opportunities for unskilled workers. Others have shown how the development of new inner-city spaces activates “geographies of displacement and marginality”, as in Glasgow where cheap hostels serving homeless people have been displaced by the development of new consumerist spaces (MacLeod, 2002, p. 265). Both the redevelopment of Eastside and our research programme into it are in their infancy, and we hope to further investigate these claims and counter claims in more detail in the future. The evidence thus far, however, suggests that, despite good intentions, large-scale corporate development interests and the directives of the local state dominate spatial change in Eastside. We have already seen, as outlined in this paper, the displacement of former uses and activities deemed inappropriate for incoming higher class values.

It could be argued that these pubs and other activities could simply find another place to operate: why should their demise be a policy concern? However, upon consideration of this question, we turned to thinking about exactly *what* was being lost from Eastside and why it mattered. We began to focus on how public discourse about regeneration is framed, and in particular how ‘what matters’ in urban regeneration is established, especially in urban policy discourse. In Eastside, and more widely, that discourse tends to centre around a conception of place that is entirely production or consumption oriented, and measured by understanding shifts in labour markets, housing markets and land values or prices. This tends to revolve around a preoccupation with material outcomes, and a privileging of the economic, or more generally material function of place as the *primary* way to measure urban public goods. The result is a ‘forgetting’ that place is much more than a collection of consumption and production activities.

Some critics offer alternative views of cities from those preoccupied with the ‘production’ side of the economic equation. They also argue that there has been a tendency to focus on narrow production-defined questions of city life and a concomitant dismissal of a (postmodernist) focus on consumption cultures. As Wynne and O’Connor state, urban studies must continue to grapple with the “changing nature of the relationship between culture and the commodity form and recognition of an increasing interpenetration of the cultural and the economic” (Wynne and O’Connor, 1998, p. 843). We support this focus, but our particular contribution is not to this literature on consumption cultures or the rapid commodification of culture in this

paper, as others have already done this well (see Bourdieu, 1984; Wynne and O'Connor, 1998; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002).

Instead, our argument seeks to extend this critique of a focus primarily on production-side questions to a more general critical understanding of an apparent evaporation of concern about the *non-commercial* aspects of life, and the extent to which this narrowly defined set of values drives the production of urban places. Bookchin notes that in much urban redevelopment the emphasis revolves too much on those “exchanging their wares than in forming *socially and ethically meaningful associations*” (Bookchin, 1995, p. 21, emphasis added). We too are concerned with questions broader than the material—of, for example, dimensions of 'community' (with an acceptance of the contested nature of that term), memory, spirituality and civic engagement. As Markusen notes, “abstractions that operate at the level of capitalist forces—capital, labour, crisis—are not helpful in understanding the complexity of particular places” (2004, p. 2312). To *privilege* questions of economic renewal, class displacement, the restructuring of labour and housing markets, or the role of land price as the overarching parameters for discussion about cities and their development allows us to forget other associations with city places that cannot be measured in these terms.

Our two Eastside pub stories begin to reveal where these missing pieces become critical. Birmingham City Council is keen to highlight how new developments contribute to an expanded civic ethic by way of enhanced employment and consumption opportunities compared to those offered by the current urban structure of Eastside. This makes the task of demolishing the *Old Railway*, for example, a simple one as it will make way for a high-tech office campus and a public park. Both are positioned as more worthy and progressive uses of space. High-tech and ICT industries will facilitate jobs growth and stimulate the city economy. A public park will bring a welcome addition of open space to the city centre and provide an opportunity for spaces of civic engagement. In the case of the *Fox and Grapes* the public interest is thought to be best served by a cleaner, more accessible development of urban space, and the creation of new jobs and housing opportunities. Analysing such narratives using the conceptual tools provided by a rich seam of gentrification research highlights how the discursive and material practices of the state in these two cases favour the interests of the affluent. Such practices have already resulted in the displacement of uses and users of this place excluded, by price and aesthetic, from this new urban future.

Yet two 'forgettings' about place automatically become evident when the debate is structured by such narrow economic terms. First is the definition of what is 'good' for cities and their citizens as firmly and only rooted in materialist views of progress. Demolishing the *Old Railway* and upgrading the *Fox and Grapes* also disrupts the memories, desires, activities, networks, connectivities and livelihoods circulating around and through these places. Their role as places for particular subcultures within the city to express their spirit, desires, aspirations and politics is simply not part of the urban planning framework. That these places are 'ugly' and degraded ignores the fact that they nevertheless support an “array of social, cultural and economic networks of meaning” (Baeten, 2004, p. 235). Writing such networks of meaning out of the policy discourse makes the figurative and material job of demolition, renovation and displacement much less complicated. It fundamentally undermines the possibility of

opposition by silencing the place itself. As Bookchin states, urban mega-projects rarely, if ever, “nourish the city as a collectivity and arena for public activity” (1995, p. 20).

The second 'forgetting' is the failure to reflect critically on the key processes by which these definitions are discursively produced and their outcomes delivered. Current policy approaches appear to draw 'cultural' (non-economic) perspectives into the frame by centralizing design, incorporating public art and making space for prestige cultural facilities. In doing so, the state generates a pro-urban liberal sympathy toward urban place making that is itself elitist and exclusionary (Lees, 2003a), and that ultimately forgets community-oriented activities, facilities and spaces that are not driven by either consumption or production (Seo, 2002).

Attending to the less tangible aspects of city places is not an easy task. It requires rethinking both research and policy approaches, and asking different questions about the historical and contemporary role of inner-city spaces and their future in the life of a city. Much good work has been established already in this regard. Taylor *et al.* (1996) provide an excellent sociological study of Manchester and Sheffield setting out how local people relate to place in those cities. A focus on the way young people utilize spaces in cities 'after-dark' (Chatterton and Hollands, 2002) also provides a sense of where we might reorient urban research questions. In the last section of the paper, we attempt to flesh out some paradigmatic changes, building on other scholarly work, that might render a richer and more effective dialogue between researchers and policy makers about the possibilities for urban policy and the future of city spaces. We do so by connecting this to the processes of change underway in Eastside, and suggesting some alternative forms of practice and research for the future.

Remembering place in urban policy and planning

Even whilst some urban commentators heralded the 'death' of place from technological innovation which allowed the emergence of a network society (see Castells, 2004) or a community without propinquity (Webber, 1963), others were noting the rise of continued uneven development at the global and local scales which suggested that qualities of place and the question of geography remain at the heart of economic, sociological and cultural questions (Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 1994). The *question* of place, then, remains a key but contested problematic for urban studies. But we also intuitively know that place means more than an assemblage of physical objects and attributes, or a set of activities and uses that structure its role in a city economy, or a neighbourhood of social actors with particular lifestyles, or a collection of eclectic individual memories and associations. Place is all of these things, contradictorily combined, and more besides. Stories of place abound in popular literature, poetry, theatre, cinema and the daily press. Such stories can engender empathy and meaning because they show the *human* face of place, the myriad individual and collective moments that help define what a place means. We each have places that are meaningful to us in personal ways—the street we grew up in, the local pub where we witnessed a street fight, a favourite park bench that catches the winter sun, the place a loved one was killed. Places also have collective meanings and memories—the local swimming pool saved from demolition by community

fundraising, an empty shop in the high street, a roadside memorial to a local character. In these terms, place also has spirit, memory and desire (Sandercock, 2003).

We know intuitively that some less tangible aspects of place engender different feelings and responses. Some places make us feel desolate, others inspire us, other places offer solace. Research shows us that place has intrinsic qualities of its own that give it 'feel', or character (Drake, 2003). New memories and desires centred in place are built every day in city spaces, layered over and within each other in a constantly shifting network of meaning. Cities offer delights and surprises (Young, 1990) that are non-material, intangible aspects of a civic urban ethic. Places within cities have "unseen layers of usage, memory and significance" (Throgmorton, 2003) that structure a sense of the sacred in city places (Sandercock, 2003, p. 226).

Conceptualizing city places as more than abstract, physical containers that house economic activities and relations requires thinking differently about the renewal of spaces that were previously forgotten or marginalized. It does not mean that city places cannot or should not ever change, but that the re-production of city places should not steal those memories, or erase them unnecessarily (Sandercock, 2003). Measures of exclusion and displacement based on property price and labour market restructuring, whilst crucially important, no longer suffice as the *entire* story about urban injustices. Consequently, measures to address those injustices must be found in realms *wider* than the material. In other words, we need a broader definition of injustice that is not limited to measuring the material realm. If we are concerned, as we should be, about justice in and for city spaces—the central theme of the gentrification literature—then the question cannot be *limited to* (though it might start with) the geography of resource allocation.

Understanding the meaning and effect of displacement and exclusion from certain city spaces, then, requires additional research and policy attention toward the non-material aspects of place. In the case of Eastside, it would entail paying attention to places like the *Old Railway* in terms of the social networks it provides, the expression of subcultures it allows, and a measurement of what this place engenders in terms of meaning and rights to the city. In places like the *Fox and Grapes*, it entails paying attention to the aspirations and desires of those who currently circulate around and through the pub, its history and associations, and its links with other parts of the district. It is a *remembering* of city spaces, rather than the active forgetting that currently dominates policy actions in Eastside.

Remembering place in this way would allow alternative policy options to arise because the very process of remembering would enable the problem to be defined in entirely different ways. Instead of the *Old Railway*, for example, presenting a *conflicting* use of space, it standing literally in the way of new civic spaces and employment nodes, the problem could be reconceptualized as one of finding visions for this city space that could build on the varied layers of meaning and connectivity that are *remembered* to exist here. The problem would instead be how to make space for the ongoing expression of subcultures and individual/collective creativity within a functionally changed place. Instead of a closing down, it could be an opening out of those subcultures to a wider population through the civic space of the park, representing an opportunity to allow diverse social groups to communicate. It would be a mechanism to understand the "various roles of culture in urban social and

economic life” that transcend mainstream or traditional views and see culture as the communal creative activity of all citizens (see Moulaert *et al.*, 2004a, p.231). It would also constitute a remembering and revalorizing of the non-economic aspects of place—a physical and symbolic statement that city places are more than the sum of their exchange and use values. Reconceptualizing justice in this way shifts attention from the distribution of resources to procedural and institutional issues of communication, deliberation and decision making (Young, 1990). It would place different principles at the heart of re-creating urban spaces, principles of “social justice, difference, citizenship, community and civic culture” (Sandercock, 1998, p. 183).

Whilst Sandercock crucially links such principles to the *processes* of urban governance and planning to show how they would redefine planning decision-making processes and outcomes, we would like to extend this connection to the very geography within and around which those principles should circulate. Both process and place must become underpinned by those principles-in-action. This means action from the research and policy communities on two related fronts.

First is a reshaping of city building and decision-making processes that begin with those principles as the first step, not the last. To do this requires an understanding of what different city places mean through rigorous research and analysis that extends beyond the economic realm. In her study of forgotten places, Markusen offers a research antidote to current academic abstractions that she diagnoses as inherently unhelpful in understanding the complexities of place. She proposes the employment of “actor-centred theories of regional change” (Markusen, 2004, p. 2312). This could focus both on the “groups of actors engaged in the act of forgetting, a feel for their motivations and behaviour, and a sense of the possible in organising and coalition-building” (p. 2312) as well as radically stretching the definition of 'stakeholders' beyond the usual residential and business interests. It is vitally important here that an understanding of such concerns is gained before any significant state-induced restructuring of place occurs. As Eastside shows, once places such as our two pubs are expropriated in the name of large-scale transformations, the social networks, memories, and meanings of these places are severed for good—even if the physical structure is rehabilitated several months or years down the line.

Second is an actual material change in real place-based outcomes. To date much of the literature (and some policy action) has focused on the inclusion of different voices in more participatory processes. This is crucial, but not the final outcome in policy terms. What is required next is to actually allow this revisioning to impact on place-based outcomes. This entails materially changed practices on the part of governments and other actors. It may, for example, include establishing core places of human (non-economic) activity and connectivity before zoning the economic functions of place. It may mean setting aside places that will be for spiritually oriented uses rather than production or consumption-oriented uses. It means thinking more widely about memory, spirit and desire and actually *making place* for these within urban redevelopment schemes and masterplans at the very outset. These kinds of spaces are crucial to life in cities, as reflected by Chatterton and Unsworth, as “they make a citizen feel at home, they nourish human contact, they help create a sense of place and civic pride, they provide numerous opportunities for serendipity, they allow people to

relax and unwind, they encourage sociability instead of isolation, and they enrich public life and democracy” (2004, p. 375).

This is not an easy task, particularly as it will have to be undertaken within the constraints of a capitalist land market system, and a local state that is continually financially squeezed. But it is possible. There are alternative models available of land ownership and redevelopment successfully operating in the UK today. Community Land Trusts, housing co-operatives and other forms of collective property rights do operate, in addition to alternative forms of investment (such as People's Pensions), and partnerships between neighbourhoods and private developers. All, and others such as suggestions offered by Chatterton and Unsworth (2004, p. 374), offer possible alternatives for exploration. The local state, as a primary land owner and occupier, can look within its own property interests to secure alternative methods of urban renewal. It must also continue to work on generating investor and developer confidence, but within well-established parameters that centralize core principles other than the raising of land values and changes in tenure. It would mean a stretching (rather than a negation or complete overhaul) of contemporary practice, to make non-commercial aspects of place an essential baseline much in the same way that other considerations (land-use surveys, economic structure, housing market, etc.) currently form that baseline.

What would this look like in practice, say in a place like Eastside? It would have to begin with a refashioning of the role of the local state in the renewal of Eastside. The objectives for the team responsible for Eastside could be redefined to include community development, citizenship, and defining and respecting the varied meanings of place. Following from this, it would require alternative practices, institutional arrangements and regulatory conditions. For example, instead of compulsorily acquiring the *Fox and Grapes* for renovation to 'appropriate standards', it would enable alternative options to emerge. Perhaps a partnership with the current owners to enable their livelihoods to continue might be possible, or a genuine dialogue between the new developers and the landlord about how to incorporate the actual meaning of the pub into the scheme. These are seemingly small and limited things, they may also be difficult to operationalize and take much longer than standard development processes. But they show that there are alternatives, if only we had the vision to imagine them.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to raise critical questions about academic and policy debates concerning gentrification, displacement and the state-led re-making of central urban space. Drawing upon the experience of ongoing regeneration processes in Birmingham's Eastside district, and particularly the fate of two longstanding pubs, it has attempted to highlight shortcomings in current perspectives and the related complexities and tensions that emerge in the transformation of such sensitive areas. It does not attempt to provide a definitive set of answers, but queries some assumptions in conventional analysis and policy thinking, and suggests some ways that the debates and research might move forward.

In particular, it has sought to illuminate the limitations and lost opportunities of a discourse that centres on the economic roles and functions of urban space and

places—some of these shortcomings are highlighted by the apparent contradictions in the relationship between the form of regeneration and the economic implications as they are emerging in Eastside. We argue that a fuller and more meaningful understanding of gentrification pressures and questions of social justice in the re-making of urban space requires attention to other meanings of place—memories, networks, and forms of social engagement. Our story of Eastside, particularly the *Old Railway* and the *Fox and Grapes*, shows clearly how such meanings and concerns do not figure in conventional policy discourse.

This is not to deny or write out the importance of economic and material considerations, not least because any practical alternative approach must still be grounded in the realities of property markets, land values and the workings of private development capital systems. Nevertheless, if the continued rehabilitation of central and inner cities is to avoid the perils of earlier experience and to create a more inclusive, just and meaningful future, then we need to find a new starting point—one that encompasses a wider array of place characteristics and meanings. This is a difficult challenge for policy makers, given the less tangible nature of some concerns discussed in this paper, but it is one that can, and must, be grasped.

Finally, the academic debate can play its part too, by broadening and deepening our understanding of complex city spaces. Ongoing rigorous analysis of the economic aspects of gentrification and related notions of class divides, and the cultural shifts that appear to be heralding new ways of consuming space, is fundamental. However, it also requires new questions to be asked about the meaning of city spaces in order to unlock urban analysis from the stalemate of supply- and demand-side debates. If urban analysts can do this and connect to wider policy discourse, then they can make a real difference to a just and sustainable future for our cities and especially their vital cores.

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